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Khmer Health Advocates
Treatment and Advocacy for Victims of Torture

Testimony in Support of **S.B. 991, An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Workers**

Human Services Committee
Theanvy Kuoch

Khmer Health Advocates

February 21, 2023

Dear Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, and esteemed members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Theanvy Kuoch and I live in West Hartford, Connecticut. I stand in support of S.B. 991, An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Workers. I am the Executive Director of Khmer Health Advocates, the National health organization for survivors of war, torture and genocide from Cambodia. We provide direct services for survivors experiencing traumatic distress living in Connecticut, as well as research and health promotion on a national level.

Our community has suffered so much. We lost a third of our families and came to the United States with little more than the clothing on our back. Community Health Workers have been so important for us because over half our 4,000 people in Connecticut do not speak English well enough to talk about their health problems and to learn how to prevent the many chronic illnesses that come from traumatic distress.

For the past 40 years our Community Health Workers have been there to help the community through crises as well as routine health problems. Working with our partners from the UCONN Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy and Social Work we have participated in research that shows that traumatic distress is a factor contributing to diabetes, hypertension, PTSD, depression and other chronic health problems. Our Community Health Workers have worked with pharmacists to prove that they can deliver Medication Therapy Management that improves the health outcomes of community as well as saving dollars on medications.

Currently, Connecticut's Medicaid program does not reimburse Community Health Worker (CHW) services or incentivize health care providers to work with CHWs. Community Health Workers are an effective way to address inequities and promote health, particularly for low-income households served by Medicaid.

Our community cannot receive equitable health care without the help of Community Health Workers who are skilled at health communications for individuals as well as for public health. Community Health Workers are the link between high risk, limited English speaking and their health care providers.

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The COVID crisis has created a funding crisis for community- based organizations. Khmer Health Advocates as well as many other CBO had to use our limited resources to deal with the pandemic. Getting back on our feet requires a sustainable funding source for our Community Health Workers. We need a career path to assure that the younger generation can continue our work because we know that trauma does not end with the victim generation.

Medicaid reimbursement for Community Health Workers should:

- Center community and CHW voices in all stages of design and implementation
- Reimburse at rates high enough to employ CHWs at a livable wage and cover the costs of supervision, billing, and routine training
- Cover a comprehensive list of CHW services

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 991, An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Workers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Theanvy Kuoch', written over a horizontal line.

Theanvy Kuoch, MA., LPC
Executive Director